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Faisalabad yearning for more

International cricket returns to the city after 17 years with Pakistan securing historic ODI series win over South Africa

By Umaid Wasim

FOOTPRINTS

THE already hustling and bustling bus stand in the heart of Faisalabad was further energised on Friday night. Some passengers were coming home for the weekend, some were coming for cricket.

Saturday's third One-day International between Pakistan and South Africa has been set up perfectly; the series, marking the return of international cricket to the city after 17 long years, tied at 1-1 ahead of the final fixture.

"I work in Islamabad and this is my hometown but I've come here specially for the match," said one passenger, scurrying for his luggage in the cargo hold of one of the executive buses that had made a stop in Faisalabad on its way to Sahiwal. "I hope it's a great game and Pakistan win tomorrow."

That sense of anticipation or the feeling of excitement wasn't shared by everyone, though.

"Cricket has returned, yes, but it's brought a lot of complications with it," Abdul Rehman, a driver from a ride-hailing app, told *Dawn*, sharing the sentiment of many across Pakistan. "The road closures for teams travelling to and from the Iqbal Stadium are too much … it's impossible to go to areas close to it."

A hazy, cool night had given way to a lazy, sun-kissed morning and the afternoon, by which the crowd had started to fill in at the venue. The return of international cricket hasn't only seen cricket enthusiasts from the city be entertained, but fans from districts and tehsils in the Faisalabad division have also come over.

"Fans have poured in from tehsils in Chiniot, Jhang and Toba Tek Singh districts as well as adjoining divisions like Sargodha and Mianwali," local television journalist Arsalan Hussain Durrani told *Dawn*.

"The appetite for cricket here is huge, crowds filled up the venue for the National T20 Cup in March so imagine how long they've been waiting for international cricket to come here even though the stadium is very basic, very much as it is since it was inaugurated in 1968."

The entrance to the stadium is through a large red brick gate but the venue itself is a throwback to the past. Just two stands, on either side of the pavilion, have seats. The rest of the seating is on steps or '*tharray*'in the local dialect.

The Iqbal Stadium is under the district administration, with the Pakistan Sports Board having been its caretaker for a few years. Two amusement parks are on either side of the venue. The Pakistan Cricket Board rents it, with the crowd turnout at the Champions Cup in September last year having convinced PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi that international cricket should finally return.

"Not only is it good for the fans in the city and the adjoining districts but the return of cricket will also see more business come to Faisalabad, which is the textile hub of the country," Umer Rafique, the owner of Celebrity Cricket League which has held exhibition cricket matches across the country, told *Dawn*.

"The fact that cricket sees packed crowds in Faisalabad is a puller for corporates, attracting greater sponsorship opportunities due to the eyeballs here," added the Faisalabad native. "And while Sialkot remains the country's sports good hub, cricket's return will help Faisalabad's textile industry as well, shining light on the exceptional sports kit-making here."

In the interim, though, it is the cricket's enthusiasts in the region that are making the most of the opportunity that has presented itself.

A group of teenaged boys, led by Sumair and Abdullah, arrived at the Iqbal Stadium in t-shirts printed with pictures of former Pakistan middle-order batter Umar Akmal accompanied with messages of 'Miss You'. "We haven't found anyone like him in the middle order since he's been cast away," quipped Abdullah in front of a loud group.

A teenaged girl and her younger brother, coming to the ground with their father, expressed her excitement, stating it was going to be her first time watching an international cricket match. Alongside them was Mohammad Yasin, '*Junior Chacha Cricket*', who arrived decked in a bright green robe of Pakistan colours.

"I go wherever Pakistan are playing and it's wonderful to see them in action here in Faisalabad," Yasin, who has travelled for the series from Lahore, told *Dawn*.

The start of the match, the toss and South African skipper Matthew Breetzke's decision to bat first, was greeted by loud roars. There 'oohs' and 'ahs' as an edge off Lhuan-dre Pretorius flew for a boundary off Haris Rauf. Cheers of "*Fauji*"accompanied Fakhar Zaman as he came towards the boundary to field, a reference to him being an officer of the Pakistan Navy.

The biggest cheers, though, came when Salman Ali Agha had Pretorius caught at long-off by Babar Azam, whom the majority of the crowd had come to see. Babar's highest first-class score of 266 came at the Iqbal Stadium in 2014, when he was a 20-year-old. Three years prior to that, he'd been part of Pakistan 'A' side that beat Afghanistan in an unofficial one-dayer at the venue.

Faisalabad's fixation with the batting superstar was evident on Saturday and the fans are hoping to see more of Babar and the national team in the times to come after Pakistan sealed a convincing victory to clinch the series 2-1.

"I've come here to see Babar and it's an opportunity I've waited for a long time," Shakeel Awan, who had travelled for the match from Toba Tek Singh — two hours away from Faisalabad, told *Dawn*. "I hope this series is the start of more to come."

FANS gather at the Iqbal Stadium ahead of the third ODI against South Africa. —Photo by the writer

PALESTINIAN boys carry pieces of wood as they make their way through the rubble of destroyed buildings in the Al-Shatee refugee camp, east of Gaza City.—AFP

Ceasefires fray as Israel kills six in Gaza, Lebanon

- Hamas returns Israeli prisoner's body; gets 15 Palestinians' bodies in return
- US coordinates Gaza aid flow but Israel maintains oversight, officials say

JERUSALEM: Israeli forces continued to wage deadly assaults across the Palestinian territories and southern Lebanon on Saturday, in a series of air and artillery attacks that violated ceasefire agreements on both fronts.

In the occupied West Bank, Israeli troops shot dead two 16-year-old boys, adding to the mounting number of Palestinian children killed by Israeli forces.

The Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah identified the victims as Mohammed Abdullah Mohammed Ateem and Muhammad Rashad Fadl Qasim, both from the village of Judeira. The ministry said Israeli forces were withholding the boys' bodies.

The Israeli military acknowledged the killings, referring to the teenagers as individuals it had "eliminated" — a term frequently employed by Israeli authorities to obscure civilian deaths and dehumanise Palestinians.

At the same time, in the besieged Strip, Israeli gunfire killed one Palestinian and wounded another near the Bureij refugee camp.

A separate attack in western Khan Younis left another Palestinian wounded, medics reported.

Three killed in Lebanon

In a separate escalation, Israeli strikes on Lebanon killed three people and wounded several others on Saturday.

Lebanon's National News Agency said two brothers from the town of Shebaa were burned alive when an Israeli missile hit their SUV. A separate strike in Baraashit killed one person and wounded four. Another Israeli strike on Saturday morning on a car near a hospital in the southern city of Bint Jbeil wounded seven people, according to the ministry.

The latest attacks came as the European Union voiced concern. "Focus by all parties must be on preserving the ceasefire and the progress achieved so far."

Body exchange

Simultaneously, under the ceasefire's prisoner exchange plan, for every one dead Israeli prisoners returned, the bodies of 15 slain Palestinians are handed back by Israel.

On Saturday, Israel identified the latest prisoner remains sent back from Gaza as those of Lior Rudaeff. Meanwhile, the Nasser Medical Centre in Khan Younis reported receiving the bodies of 15 Palestinians.

US, Israel coordinate aid

Meanwhile, according to the Washington Post, US forces are now involved in coordinating aid through the US-led Civil-Military Coordination Center (CMCC) that will replace Israel in overseeing aid into Gaza. It cited a US official and people familiar with the matter as saying Israel was part of the process but that CMCC would decide what aid enters Gaza and how.

However, an Israeli security official confirmed that Israel remains part of the supervision and monitoring process, with decisions made jointly. This suggests little change to the stifling Israeli control over what aid enters Gaza.—Agencies

Tehran faces rationing of water amid worst drought

TEHRAN: Iran was laying plans on Saturday to cut off water supplies periodically to Tehran's 10-million-strong population as it battles its worst drought in many decades.

Rainfall in the capital has this year been at its lowest level in a century, local officials say, and half of Iran's provinces have not seen a drop fall in months.

Now, to save water, the government is planning water cuts in Tehran — and several local news outlets have already reported pipes running dry overnight in some areas.

"This will help avoid waste even though it may cause inconvenience," Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Ali Abadi said on state television.

In a speech broadcast on Friday, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian had warned that Tehran might have to be evacuated if no rain falls before the end of the year.

But he gave no details about how such a vast operation would be conducted.

Tehran nestles on the southern slopes of the Alborz mountains and has hot dry summers usually relieved by autumn rains and winter snowfall.

Tehran is by far the country's biggest city and its inhabitants use three million cubic metres of water per day, according to local media.

The main Amir Kabir dam on the Karaj river, one of five reservoirs serving the capital, is running dry and holds only 14 million cubic litres, according to Behzad Parsa, director general of the Tehran water company, cited by the official news agency *IRNA*.

During the same period last year, the reservoir held 86 million cubic metres, he added, but now it only has enough to maintain supplies to the Tehran region for less than two weeks.—AFP

'Massive' Russian air attack kills four in Ukraine

- Strikes damage crucial energy infrastructure
- Moscow claims capturing small village in eastern Ukraine

KYIV: Russia launched a barrage of drones and missiles in overnight attacks on Ukraine, killing at least three people and damaging large energy infrastructure facilities in three regions, Ukrainian officials said on Saturday.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had launched more than 450 drones and 45 missiles. Two people were killed and 12 were wounded in the city of Dnipro when a drone hit an apartment building. One person was killed in the Kharkiv region, regional officials said.

Energy facilities in the Kyiv, Poltava and Kharkiv regions were damaged, Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said, adding the government and energy companies were working to restore damaged electricity, water and heating provision.

In response, Zelensky said sanctions pressure on Moscow should be intensified.

"...for every Moscow strike on energy infrastructure aimed at harming ordinary people before winter there must be a sanctions response targeting all Russian energy, with no exceptions," he said on the Telegram app.

Moscow's Defence Ministry said it had launched "a massive strike with high-precision long-range air, ground and sea-based weapons" on weapon production and energy facilities in response to Kyiv's strikes on Russia. The Ukrainian air force said it shot down 406 Russian drones and nine missiles. It said 26 Russian missiles and 52 drones had hit 25 sites.

Russia captures tiny village

Meanwhile, Russia also said its forces continued to advance in grinding battles around the towns of Pokrovsk and Kupiansk, and had captured a tiny village in eastern Ukraine.

The Defence Ministry said on Telegram that its forces had taken Vovche, in the south-east corner of the Dnipropetrovsk region.

In the Donetsk region, Russia said it continued to gain ground in house-by-house fighting in the strategic town of Pokrovsk , as well as nearby Myrnohrad. Russia, which refers to the towns by their Soviet-era names of Krasnoarmeisk and Dmitrov, has said they are both encircled.

The ministry also said its forces are making progress in Kupiansk, in the Kharkiv region, where it says Ukrainian units are also surrounded. .—Agencies

US boycotts G20 event to protest 'whites' killing'

South Africa calls Trump's decision 'regrettable', pledges smooth summit

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump has said no US officials will attend the G20 summit in South Africa, reviving debunked claims of white Afrikaners being systematically "killed and slaughtered" in the country.

Trump had announced in September that Vice President JD Vance would travel to the meeting later this month instead of him, but has now said that US representatives will skip it entirely.

"It is a total disgrace that the G20 will be held in South Africa," Trump said on his Truth Social network. "No US Government Official will attend as long as these Human Rights abuses continue."

Trump said that Afrikaners — descendants of the first European settlers of South Africa — "are being killed and slaughtered, and their land and farms are being illegally confiscated". He added that he looked forward to hosting the 2026 G20 summit in the US — which the billionaire US president will controversially hold at his own golf resort in Miami, Florida.

The South African foreign ministry called Trump's comments "regrettable" and said it was looking forward to hosting a "successful" summit set for November 22-23.

"The characterisation of Afrikaners as an exclusively white group is ahistorical. Furthermore, the claim that this community faces persecution is not substantiated by fact," it said in a statement.

Pretoria chose "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability" as the theme for its G20 presidency but has faced some resistance, including from Washington.

"South Africa's focus remains on its positive global contributions," the foreign ministry said.

"Drawing on our own journey from racial and ethnic division to democracy, our nation is uniquely positioned to champion within the G20 a future of genuine solidarity."

Trump has singled out South Africa for harsh treatment on a number of issues since he returned to the White House in January, most notably on his false claims of a "white genocide" in the country.

He ambushed South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in the Oval office earlier this year, playing a video in which he alleged a campaign against white farmers by the post-apartheid government.

South Africa's government denies any such policy. Trump's administration announced plans last week to drastically cut back the number of refugees to be accepted annually by the United States to a record low of 7,500 — and give priority to white South Africans.—AFP

Trump voters feel shutdown's pain but stand by him

- Despite personal financial hits, they remain steadfast in their allegiance
- Interviews show Democratic lawmakers get blame for the impasse by linking a funding bill to healthcare subsidies
- Anxiety grows among those not furloughed yet

WASHINGTON: The US longest government shutdown is affecting millions financially, as federal workers miss paychecks and families face disrupted public benefits, however, many Trump voters remain supportive despite the disruption.

Conversations with Trump voters, part of a group of 20 whom *Reuters* has interviewed monthly, reveal that despite tangible hardships from the shutdown, their opinion of Trump or their core beliefs remain unchanged.

While both Democrats and Republicans worry about the political consequences of the shutdown, the interviews show that pre-existing ideological divisions are holding firm.

Most of the 20 voters on the panel align with the two-fifths of Americans who, according to a recent Reuters-Ipsos poll, blame Democratic lawmakers for the impasse.

The central conflict is Democrats want to extend expiring healthcare subsidies via the Affordable Care Act and demand Republican agreement before voting to reopen the government.

A few voters on the panel see both parties at fault or object to the administration's shutdown strategy.

Here is how the shutdown has affected these voters:

A 74-year-old retiree Joyce Kenney from Prescott Valley, Arizona, felt the shutdown's impact when her goddaughter, a federal employee and tenant, was furloughed in October.

Kenney advised her to seek unemployment benefits to help pay her bills, including the $2,000 monthly rent. However, these benefits cover only two-thirds of the rent, leaving little for other expenses.

"It's a domino effect," Kenney noted. "Her lack of pay means I don't get paid, requiring me to cut back, affecting others downstream."

Kenney blames Democrats for the shutdown due to VP JD Vance's claim that extending healthcare subsidies will aid undocumented immigrants, a view rejected by Democrats and budget analysts.

Blows to small business

In Tampa, the shutdown cost Steve Egan a $4,000 sale after a Veterans Affairs hospital cancelled its order for beaded necklaces for the Gasparilla Pirate Festival due to withdrawal from the event.

Flight delays and longer customs processing times have also forced Egan, 65, to shorten the lead time he can offer clients for overseas orders.

When a sheriff's office needed 300 T-shirts for a November event, Egan found a good overseas supplier deal.

Usually, clients have 45 days to decide, but due to shipping uncertainties, Egan could only offer half that time, which was too tight.

Egan, who has previously expressed regret for his Trump vote, blames both parties for the shutdown.

He wants Republicans to compromise on healthcare subsidies, urging them to fund it.

Robert Billups, a 34-year-old accountant in Washington state, feels pressured by the shutdown. He worries federal cuts will intensify competition in an already tight job market.

His last interview was for a government contractor role, and he suspects the position went to a recently terminated federal employee who already had the required security clearance.

Meanwhile, his mother, an IRS contractor, has been furloughed since mid-October, worsening her job anxiety caused by federal workforce cuts since early 2025.

While his mother blames Republicans for the stalemate, Billups understands their spending limits' focus.

He sees no winner, stating the polarisation harms both sides.

Anxiety for non-furloughed

Federal employees with paychecks are anxious. Amanda Taylor, 52, in Georgia fears her husband's federal job may be at risk if the shutdown continues.

Despite having voted for President Joe Biden in 2020, she blames Democrats "100pc for the shutdown".

She criticised Democrats for tying Obamacare supplements to the budget, noting they're not expired yet, and suggested passing the budget first.—Reuters

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